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SUBJECT: (SBU) CONGO(B) GOVERNMENT UNEASY OVER EVENTS IN NORTHERN DRC

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: Congo(B) MFA called in the Ambassador November 27 to express government uneasiness over the situation in northern DRC which has led to a significant refugee influx to Congo(B). The government is having difficulty determining what is actually happening in the affected region and believes the DRC government is not devoting adequate concern. Congo(B) hopes the international community will "take steps." END SUMMARY.

2.(SBU) At the direction of the Foreign Minister, MFA Secretary General Daniel Owassa convoked the Ambassador on short notice November 27. His subject was events in Equateur province in the DRC, which has led to a large influx of displaced/refugees across the Oubangi River into the Likouala region of the Republic of Congo.

3.(SBU) Owassa noted the refugee influx ("almost 50,000"), saying that the Congo(B) government viewed the situation as very serious. He said it was necessary for the international community to "take steps," because in his government's view, the situation had gone beyond the competence of the DRC government. In Congo(B)'s discussions with the DRC, it has become clear that Kinshasa does not know what is happening in the affected region. There is no government structure there to receive and transmit information to the central government.

4.(SBU) Meanwhile the influx to Congo(B) has virtually doubled the population in the region along the river. In the context of planning the Congo(B) response, the government needs to know what is causing this problem. Initially, he said, it had been reported that it was a matter of conflict over fish and fish ponds. But now a MONUC helicopter has been fired on, and it landed in Congo(B) territory. What should the government be telling its representatives in the region? Should they expect an influx of armed men, if the conflict intensifies, or will the population arriving continue to be made up largely of women and children? Is a militia involved, and if so, whose? What were the implications of the incident involving the helicopter? Would it affect the potential ability to use MONUC logistics to support supplies for the DRC residents who have fled across the river? Without a clear appreciation of the direction events have and might take in the DRC, it is hard to plan a response.

5.(SBU) Owassa said that he had spoken with the French, the Belgians, the EU Presidency (Italy), and the Central African Republic about this situation.

6.(SBU) COMMENT: Though it was not put in so many words, the clear implication was that we were being called on to help inject some urgency into the DRC government, to call on Kinshasa to sharpen its appreciation of the situation and to signal what

its response is going to be. This demarche was also intended to heighten potential donor sensitivities to the gravity of the humanitarian situation in this distant and difficult region of the Republic of Congo.

EASTHAM